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# Message Text

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44
ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NEAE-00 DHA-02 INR-05 SP-02 PRS-01

CU-02 /034 W
---------- 005983
P 181505Z FEB 76
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6307

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 878

STADIS//////////////////////////////////

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, SY
SUBJ: CONDITION OF SYRIAN JEWS

REF: STATE 35801

1. SUMMARY: OUR DIRECT AND INDIRECT CONTACTS WITH SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY OF APPROXIMATELY 4,700 PEOPLE INDICATE PROGRESS BEING MADE TO REDUCE REMAINING AREAS OF OFFICIALLY DIRECTED DISCRIMINATION AGAINST JEWISH COMMUNITY. COMMUNITY LEADERS HAVE ESTABLISHED CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION WITH SARG TO EXPRESS THEIR GRIEVANCES WHICH THEY ARE USING TO PRESS FOR AMELIORATION OF INTERNAL TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS AND RELIGION IDENTIFICATION ON IDENTITY DOCUMENTS. IN ADDITION, JEWS ARE PERMITTED STUDY AT SYRIAN UNIVERSITIES; SOME BUSINESSMEN GRANTED EXPORT-IMPORT LICENSES, PROPERTY CAN BE SOLD IF REPLACEMENT PURCHASED, TRAVEL ABROAD PERMITTED IN SOME CASES UPON POSTING BOND, SOME DAMASCUS JEWS ARE ESTABLISHING THEIR RESIDENCES OUTSIDE JEWISH QUARTER, AND THEIR COMMERCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES THRIVING. END SUMMARY.

2. OVER PAST FEW MONTHS, EMBASSY HAS HAD OPPORTUNITY THROUGH DIRECT AND INDIRECT CONTACTS TO ACQUIRE CONSIDERABLE
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AMOUNT OF INFORMATION ON STATUS AND CONDITIONS OF LIFE

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OF SYRIA'S APPROXIMATELY 4,700 JEWS. (BASED ON FIGURES
DERIVED FROM JEWISH SOURCES, WE ESTIMATE DAMASCUS
COMMUNITY POPULATION AT 2,900, ALEPPO 1,300 AND QAMISHLE
500.) WE HAVE REPORTS THAT MEMBERS OF THESE SYRIAN
JEWISH COMMUNITIES ARE INCREASINGLY TAKING MORE ACTIVE ROLE
IN SEEKING TO REDUCE REMAINING AREAS OF OFFICIAL DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST SYRIAN JEWS, AND FEEL SOME CONFIDENCE THAT BARRIERS
BETWEEN THEM AND THEIR FELLOW SYRIANS ARE DISSIPATING AS WELL.
DAMASCUS JEWISH COMMUNITY LEADERS HAVE ESTABLISHED CONTACTS
WITH SYRIAN AUTHORITIES WHICH SOME OF THEM BELIEVE
SERVE AS EFFECTIVE CHANNELS TO FUNNEL INTO TOP LEVEL
OF SARG FOR COMMUNITY REQUESTS THAT COMMUNITY THEIR GRIEVANCES
BE AMELIORATED. THEIR CONCERN FOCUSES ON THREE ISSUES:
PROHIBITION ON EMIGRATION, RESTRICTIONS ON INTERNAL TRAVEL,
AND SPECIAL STAMPS ON THEIR SYRIAN ID CARDS IDENTIFYING
THEM AS JEWS. THOSE AREAS OF DISCRIMINATION APPARENTLY CONSIDERED
IRRITATING BUT TOLERABLE BY JEWISH COMMUNITY AT PRESENT
INCLUDE REGULATION OF PROPERTY SALES, LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES
FOR GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT AND NEED TO COORDINATE SOME ACTIONS --
SUCH AS UNIVERSITY ENTRY -- WITH SARG BUREAUCRACY.

3. SOURCES WITHIN COMMUNITY INFORM US THAT EXCESS OF
MARRIAGEABLE WOMEN OVER MEN IS CONSIDERED MAJOR PROBLEM
RESULTING FROM LACK OF PROGRESS ON EMIGRATION ISSUE.
MURDER OF FOUR JEWISH GIRLS IN 1974 WHO TRIED ESCAPE
SYRIA STILL FRESH IN PEOPLE'S MINDS. THAT TRAGEDY, TOGETHER
WITH UNATTRACTIVENESS OF LEBANON AS WAY STATION DUE TO
DETERIORATION BEGINNING LAST YEAR OF LEBANESE LAW AND ORDER, ARE
PROBABLY MAIN REASON ILLEGAL EMIGRATION HAS APPARENTLY
STOPPED FOR PAST YEAR.HON MORE POSITIVE SIDE OF LEDGER
HOPES OF SOME IN COMMUNITY THAT PROGRESS MADE SO FAR
IN REDRESSING SPECIFIC GRIEVANCES CAN BE FURTHER IMPROVED UPON
IN FUTURE MAY HAVE ACTED TO RESTRAIN THEM
FROM RISKING USE OF "UNDERGROUND RAILWAY".

4. COMMUNITY LEADERS HAVE POINTED OUT TO AUTHORITIES THAT
FORMAL PERMISSION NEEDED FOR INTERNAL TRAVEL IS VIRTUALLY
AUTOMATIC. THEY BELIEVE THAT PERMIT REQUIREMENT MAY BE DROPPED
ALTOGETHER BY SARG IN NEAR FUTURE; TRAVEL OUTSIDE SYRIA
GRANTED IN SOME CASES FOR MEDICAL, TOURISM OR BUSINESS
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REASONS AND AFTER POSTING OF BOND, USUALLY IN
AMOUNT OF 25,000 L.S. (US $6,850) (WE HAVE ISSUEDS SOME
VISAS PAST YEAR AS HAVE OTHER EMBASSIES. ITALIANS, FOR
EXAMPLE, HAVE ISSUED FOUR TRAVEL VISAS FOR SYRIAN JEWS);
COMMUNITY SAYS THERE IS SOME HOPE THAT REFERENCES TO RELIGION
MAY BE ERASED FROM THEIR ID CARDS IF SARG APPROVES PETITION
TO THIS EFFECT (REMOVAL OF SUCH DETAIL IS NOW THE NORM
FOR OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN SYRIA BUT EXCEPTIONS STILL

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COME TO OUR ATTENTION); REQUEST FOR EXPANDED LIST OF JEWISH MERCHANTS ABLE TO RECEIVE IMPORT/EXPORT LICENSES HAS ALSO BEEN SUBMITTED TO SARG FOR CONSIDERATION; JEWISH STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO ATTEND DAMASCUS UNIVERSITY, ALTHOUGH THEY MUST RECEIVE PERMISSION FROM INTERIOR MINISTRY (APPROXIMATELY THIRTY-FIVE NOW PURSUING THEIR STUDIES, AND STUDENTS HAVE BEEN GRADUATING REGULARLY, INDICATING UNIVERSITY STUDY IS NOT OPTION ONLY RECENTLY GRANTED TO JEWS).

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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NEAE-00 DHA-02 INR-05 SP-02 PRS-01

CU-02 /034 W
---------- 006241
P 181505Z FEB 76
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6308

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 0878

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5. KNOWLEDGE OF AVERAGE SYRIAN ABOUT CONDITIONS OF SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY IS GENERALLY ACCURATE BUT LACKING INSIGHT INTO UNDERLYING PSYCHOLOGY OF COMMUNITY HOPES AND FEARS. SYRIANS BELIEVE THEIR JEWISH COMPATRIOTS HAVE MANAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN OVERALL UPSWING IN SYRIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SINCE ADVENT OF ASAD REGIME -- PERCEPTION WHICH EMBASSY HAS NO EVIDENCE TO CONTRADICT -- AND ARE FOND OF REFERRING TO JEWISH MERCHANT, DOCTOR OR LAWYER WITH WHOM THEY ROUTINELY DEAL OFTEN WITH EXCLAMATION THAT "I DID NOT EVEN KNOW HE WAS A JEW WHEN I FIRST MET HIM." JEWS THEMSELVES FREELY ADMIT THAT FOURTEEN DAMASCUS COMMUNITY DOCTORS COULD NOT REMAIN IN BUSINESS WITHOUT THEIR NON-JEWISH PATIENTS, WHO COMPRISE BULK OF THEIR PRACTICE; SIX KOSHER BUTCHERS IN DAMASCUS RELY SO MUCH ON NON-JEWISH

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CUSTOMERS THAT AT LEAST ONE HAS ESTABLISHED HIS SHOP
IN CHRISTIAN QUARTER OF CITY; AND ONE OF THREE DAMASCUS
JEWISH LAWYERS CATERS ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY TO MUSLIM AND
CHRISTIAN CLIENTS AND HAS NON-JEWISH LAW PARTNER.
SOME CHRISTIANS EXPRESS TO US APPREHENSION SIMILAR
TO THAT FELT BY SOME MEMBERS OF JEWISH COMMUNITY THAT TOLERABLE
AND GENERALLY IMPROVING CONDITIONS MIGHT NOT LAST. THEY PROFESS
THEIR FEARS THAT PRESENT MINORITY ALAWITE GOVERNMENT,
SENSITIVE TO MINORITY CONCERNS, MIGHT BE REPLACED AT ANY
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TIME BY REGIME LESS INTERESTED IN HEEDING REQUEST OF
JEWISH COMMUNITY.

6. TO SOME EXTENT LACK OF DEPTH IN PERCEPTIONS OF
EVEN EDUCATED SYRIANS ABOUT CONDITIONS IN
JEWISH COMMUNITY REFLECTIVE OF BASICALLY CONFESSIONAL
SOCIETY IN WHICH MEMBERS OF EACH RELIGIOUS GROUP
GENERALLY CLOSE RANKS TOGETHER TO HELP COMMUNITY MEMBERS
AND IGNORE CONDITIONS OF OUTSIDERS. SYRIAN JEWS ARE NOT CONFINED
TO RESIDENCE IN TRADITIONAL JEWISH QUARTER. DETERMINATION
OF SOME YOUNGER COUPLES TO RESIDE OUTSIDE JEWISH QUARTER AND OF
YOUNG DENTIST TO RENT SHOP/RESIDENCE AWAY FROM COMMUNITY
STRIKES US AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF WILLINGNESS SOME JEWS TO
OVERCOME THEIR FEARS AND ESTABLISH STRONGER BONDS WITH
NON-JEWISH SYRIAN SOCIETY. EMBASSY ALSO BELIEVES THAT
THE VARIOUS EXPRESSIONS OF US CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY HAVE
HELPED SENSITIZE SARG TO FACT IT HAS A PROBLEM WITH WHICH
IT MUST DEAL.

7. JEWISH COMMUNITY DOES NOT SEEM DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT
LACK OF PROGRESS IN SECURING EMPLOYMENT WITHIN SARG.
THEY ATTRIBUTED THIS TO LOW GOVERNMENT SALARIES VS.
OPPORTUNITIES IN PRIVATE SECTOR. SENSITIVE POSITIONS IN
MILITARY/SECURITY/INTELLIGENCE FIELDS ARE FORBIDDEN THEM,
AND IN ANY CASE USUALLY FILLED BY INDIVIDUALS ON ACTIVE
MILITARY DUTY STATUS. (JEWS ARE NOT ACCEPTED INTO SYRIAN
ARMY.)

8. IN CONCLUSION, THROUGH OUR CONTACTS WITH PEOPLE LIKE
CBS NEWSMAN MIKE WALLACE AND HIS STAFF WHO HAVE RECENTLY
PROBED DEEPLY INTO SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY AS WELL AS
OUR OWN EFFORTS AND GLEANINGS FROM LOCAL SOURCES, WE
CONSIDER THAT JEWS IN DAMASCUS AT LEAST ARE BECOMING
READIER TO BRING THEIR CONCERNS OVER
DISCRIMINATORY ACTIONS AFFECTING THEIR COMMUNITY TO
ATTENTION OF SARG. COMMUNITY EXPRESSES HOPE THAT POLICY
OF INCREMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS WILL GRADUALLY LEAD TO
EASING OF RESTRICTIONS, EVEN IN EMIGRATION AREA. THEIR
DEPENDENCE UPON NON-JEWISH COMMERCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL

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CLIENTELE HAS HELPED MOVE THEM INTO SYRIAN ECONOMIC
MAINSTREAM. AT SAME TIME, THEY HAVE NO REAL INDEPENDENT
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POWER BASE WITHIN SYRIA FROM WHICH THEY CAN PRESSURE
REGIME INTO FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS IN REGULATIONS GOVERNING
THEIR STATUS. THEY CAN ONLY IMPORTUNE THAT PRESIDENT
THROUGH ESTABLISHED SECURITY CHANNELS AND SEEK REDRESS AT HIS
SUFFERANCE. THEIR PERSECUTION HAS ENDED; THE REGIME
TOLERATES NO ROUGH HANDLING OF THEM OR ANY OTHER MINORITY
AS A GROUP. THEY ARE FATALISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE AND SOME
AT LEAST WOULD WELCOME THE CHANCE TO LEAVE SYRIA.

9. DEPT. PLEASE PASS OTHER POSTS AS DESIRED.
MURPHY

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# Message Attributes

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**Subject:** CONDITION OF SYRIAN JEWS
**TAGS:** PINS, SY
**To:** STATE
**Type:** TE
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